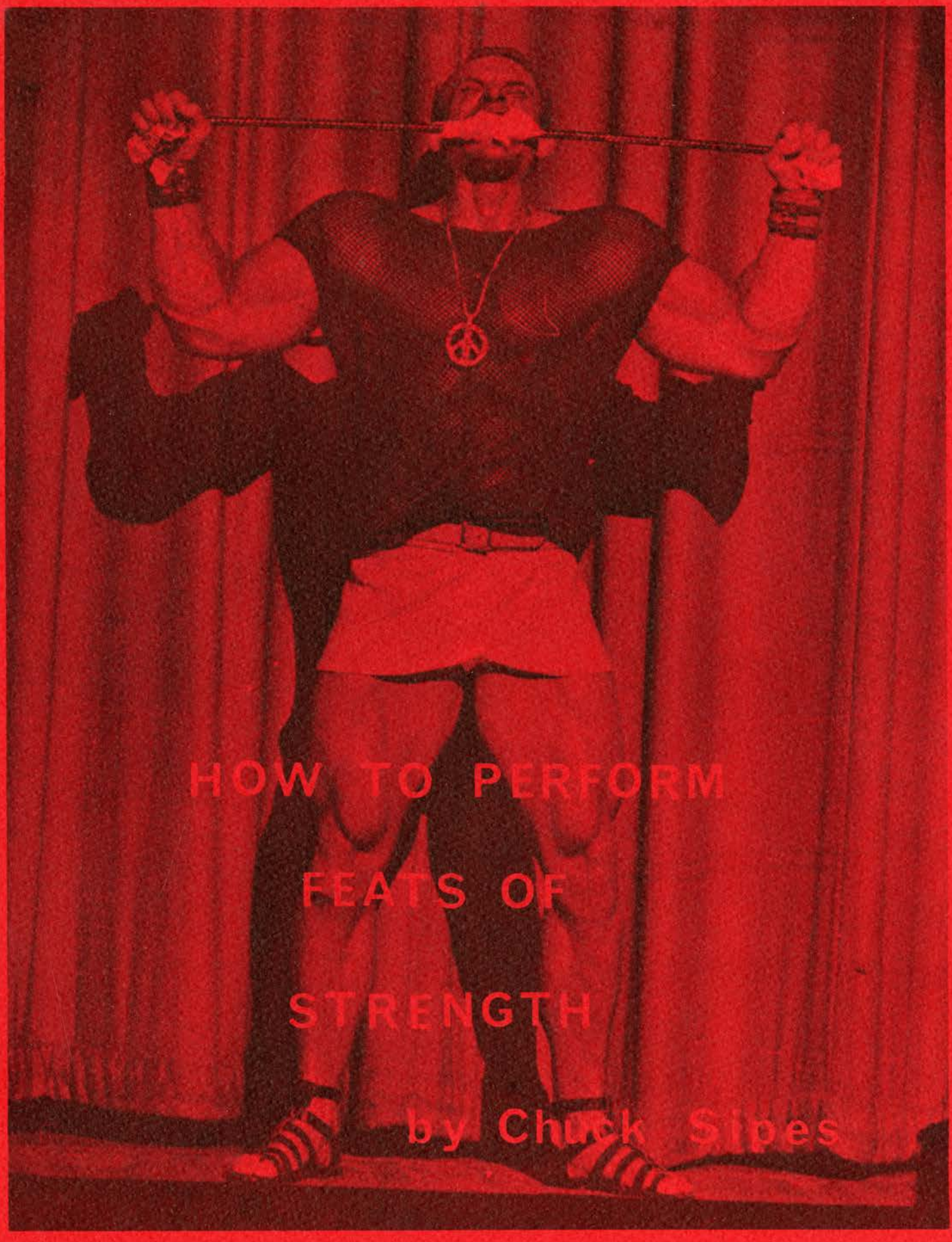

HOW TO PERFORM
FEATS OF
STRENGTH
by Chuck Sipes

HOW TO PERFORM FEATS OF STRENGTH

Published by Rue Snodgrass Publisher Extraordinare

foreword

I can remember the first time I saw a stongman act. As a matter of fact I have every detail of that act embedded in my head. For me his performance was a memorable event; which led to my interest in the performing of feats of strength.

The curtains parted (as I remember) and revealed a sinuous strongman standing in the middle of the stage. His hands held an iron bar which he placed between his teeth and dramatically began to bend it. As the bar gave way I could see the heavy muscled forearms swelling, the deltoids contracting, and the biceps bulging. The audience was struck dumb with awe at his tremendous strength.

All this left a great impression on me. I wanted to rush home and start bending something. Instead I began by searching for information on feats of strength. I wanted to know how to do them and how to train for the best results. But it took me a long time to find anything out. There were few books available. In fact most of the information I managed to get together was from other bodybuilders I talked with. I kept searching.

Once I learned enough about a strength feat, and practiced it long enough, I was able to demonstrate it before others. It wasn't very long before I became proficient enough at several of these feats and was able to put them together as an act. Then I began appearing before large audiences. My dream had become a reality.

That is why I wanted to write this book, to give you an easier approach in the right direction, with all the details of how to perform these feats. There's nothing better than to be admired by others. Being able to accomplish something that others will commend you for is a great feeling.

So go to it, and begin practicing the following feats of strength.

Good Luck,

Chuck Sipes

bending a steel bar

A most impressive feat of strength for a strong man act is bending a steel bar, particularly when the bar is bent between the teeth. Few feats equal the dynamic and herculean impression created when the steel is seen to bend under the stress of human power. I have used this feat in my strength presentation for a number of years now with great success. It has never failed to arouse a lot of interest and applause. It is a feat that anyone with the necessary strength can master with effort and practice.

Actually your teeth and jaws act as a vise. Tremendous strain is put on the teeth and jaws and neck muscles, so it is important that you condition these areas completely before attempting such a feat to insure against injury.

The best way to condition your jaws is to wrap a broom stick with a soft cloth and bite into it, pulling down with the arms, constantly exerting more and more pressure on the jaw and neck muscles. After a few weeks you will find the jaw and neck can stand as much pressure as you can apply. When you feel you can stand more pressure, you can progress to bending steel bars.

This of course is building power and strength into the arms and shoulders. Any good arm development routine is fine, but it must include work for the forearm and hands. A strong grip is essential for doing many feats of strength and it can be strengthened tremendously with proper exercise and diet.

At this point I would like to list a schedule I have followed for a number of months to increase the strength in my arms and hands:

1.Reverse barbell curl 4s/10r
2.Reverse cable curl 4s/10r
3.D/B f-arm-wrist curl 4s/10r
4.Cheat barbell curl 4s/10r
5.French barbell press 4s/8r

Also I enjoy squeezing hand grips and compressing a rubber ball with my hands.Concentrate on a deep contracted squeeze, putting full effort into the movement. I have found 6 sets of 20 reps for each hand to be of greatest benefit to me.

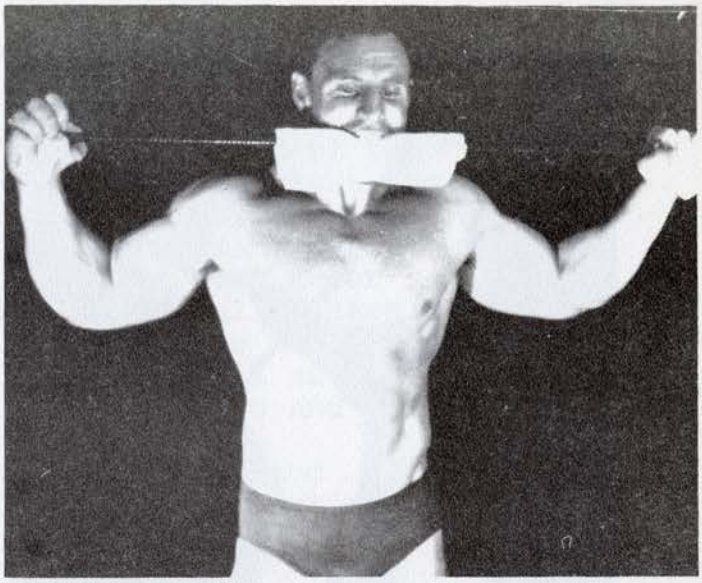
this article first appeared in Iron Man Magazine, Vol.27, No. 2

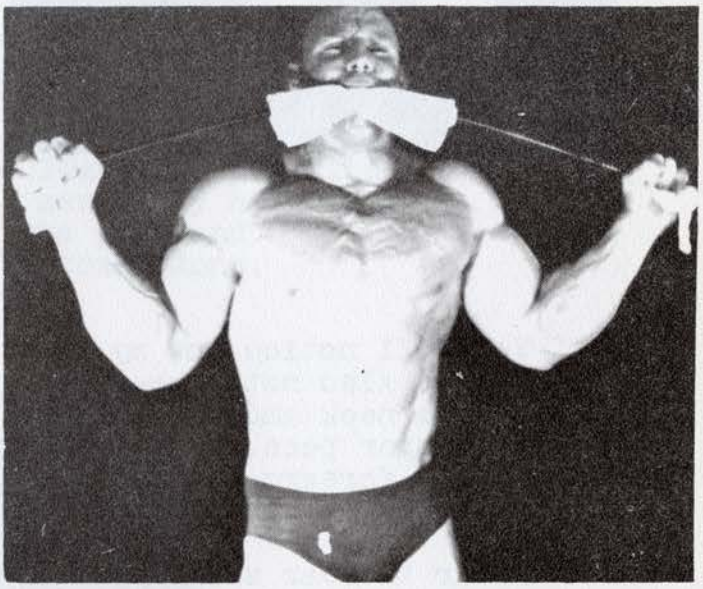
After a few weeks of this training and practice you will be ready to tackle some steel bars. To begin with, obtain a few small diameter bars to practice on. As your strength grows and your jaw and neck muscles get used to withstanding the added stress of steel you will want to progress to larger bars. They should be cut slightly longer than shoulder width. This will give you about the correct leverage to start the bend,you will find flat steel bars best to use at first.

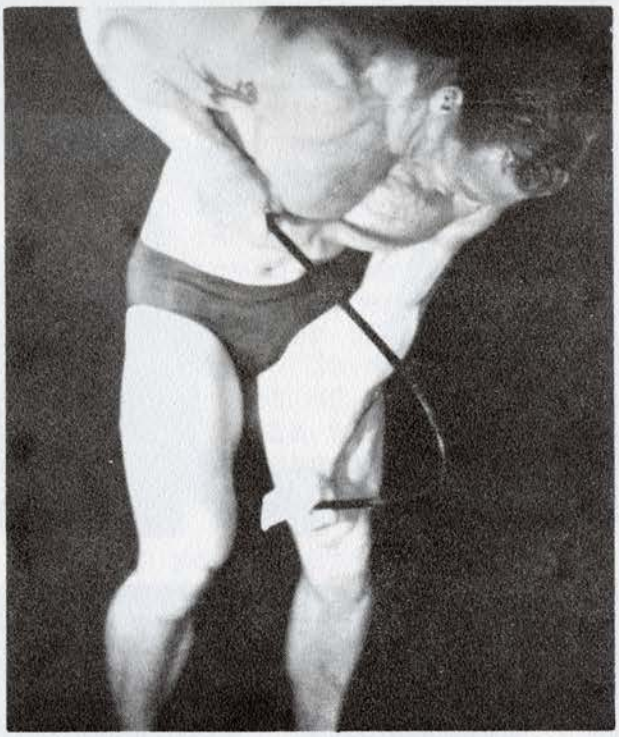
Now I will describe how I perform the feat. I use a heavy steel reinforcement bar which is round and more difficult to bend because of its shape and because it is fabricated of the hardest steel. In a round bar the structure of the steel is more compact than in a flat bar. You will find nothing more difficult than this to bend and when you have bent it you can honestly feel you have reached the ultimate in this form of strength feat.

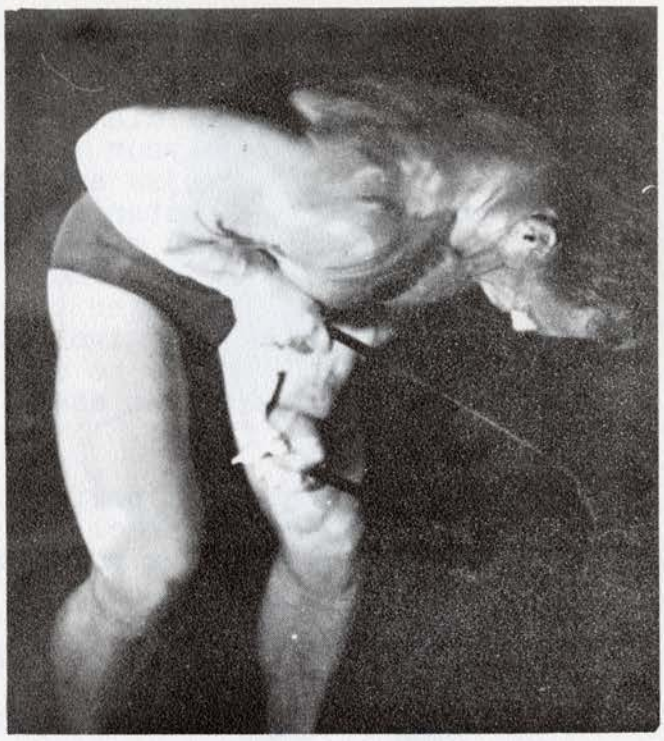
I wrap the bar at the center with a soft cloth, thick enough to enable me to get a firm bite and to protect the teeth from any contact with the steel. I place the center of the bar in my mouth and clamp down firmly with the teeth until I'm assured of a substantial bite. This will act as the vise to make the bend so you must hold the bar steady, using the muscles of the neck to hold it rigid. At this time I wrap each end of the bar with a handkerchief to prevent cutting the hands, and then grasp with as tight a grip as I can.

I'm ready now to make the initial bend. With all the strength I can summon I start pulling downward with the hands and arms. At first I'm subject to great stress in the jaws and neck until I feel the bar begin to bend. After the first bend the stress shifts to arms and shoulders.









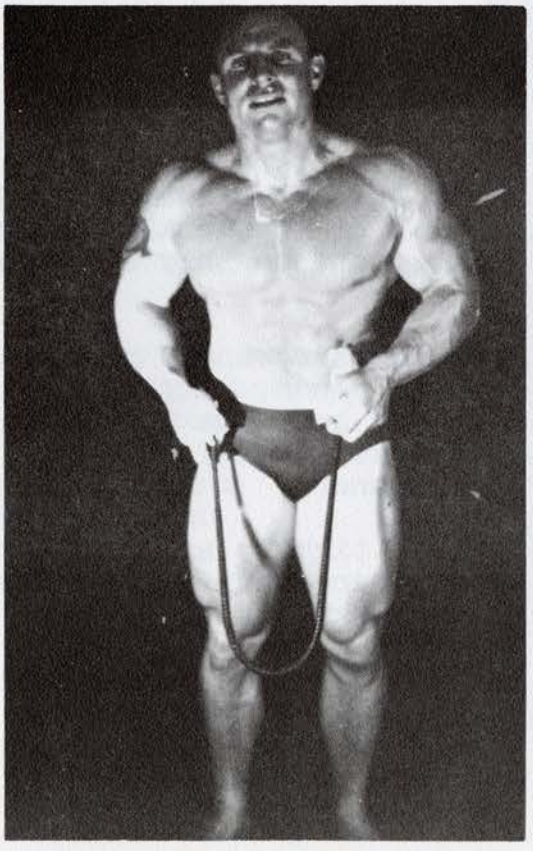
You will notice how my lats spread to support the initial pull. Also note the swelling of the muscles at the base of the neck and, especially, the full contraction of deltoids and upper pecs. You will also see a similar swelling of the entire forearm, which will give you a good idea of the degree of gripping strength required.

After the bar starts to bend it is very important that I keep it moving. As the bend continues you will notice in the photos that the stress shifts to the arms as the ends of the bar approach each other. Through the entire bend you see that the pecs exert a continual pull, evidenced by the swelling and pulling of the muscle striations and the increasing prominence of the vascular network. At the downward end of the pull you will notice that the arms play the most important part in supplying the power to force the bar ends towards each other. Through the entire movement it is absolutely necessary to maintain continuous and sustained pressure on the bar until it reaches the complete bend. It is a contest, all the way, between muscles and steel, and you must make up your mind beforehand that the muscles are going to win.

When the bar is bent to the utmost in the teeth, it is necessary to finish the bend in the knee position. In a flowing motion I place the back of the left hand against the inner thigh of the left leg. I bend at the waist and continue the drive of power with the right arm and shoulder until the bar is bent into a full horseshoe shape. Gripping strength is even more important here, since the round bar can easily turn in the hand under pressure. The full strength of the hands really shows at this point. In all of these bending feats the muscles of my upper arms swell to tremendous size, as well as the thickening of muscles and tendons at the elbows and wrists.

As you practice this feat, mastering the style and increasing your strength, you can graduate to heavier steel until you reach a maximum diameter. I'm sure you will enjoy doing this feat, which is one of the most impressive displays of rugged power I know of. I like to perform it under correct lighting, so the muscles can be clearly seen at work, and with some impressive, dynamic music in the background. It seems to leave an audience spellbound.

If you take the time and effort to learn and practice some displays of strength you will certainly help to keep alive some great memories of the past and preserve some of the great strength traditions.



bursting a hot water bottle

Inflating and bursting a hot water bottle is an amazing display of lung power. Anyone who can learn to perform this feat will surely be a hit at any gathering. This unusual performance of strength will exemplify your inner powers and endurance.

I can remember the first time I burst a hot water bottle. It gave me such a terrific feeling of accomplishment. Now, after many years of performing this feat, my audience always reacts with admiration and plenty of applause.

Don't despair if at first you don't succeed. You will only be able to inflate the bottle part way in the beginning. As you become familiar with the proper steps and master them you will be able to burst the bottle. It takes plenty of lung power and just as much will power to keep that bottle in control and inflating until it burst.

For proper control of this feat there are two main things to keep in mind: your grip and correct breathing. With practice and control of these two important points you will succeed.

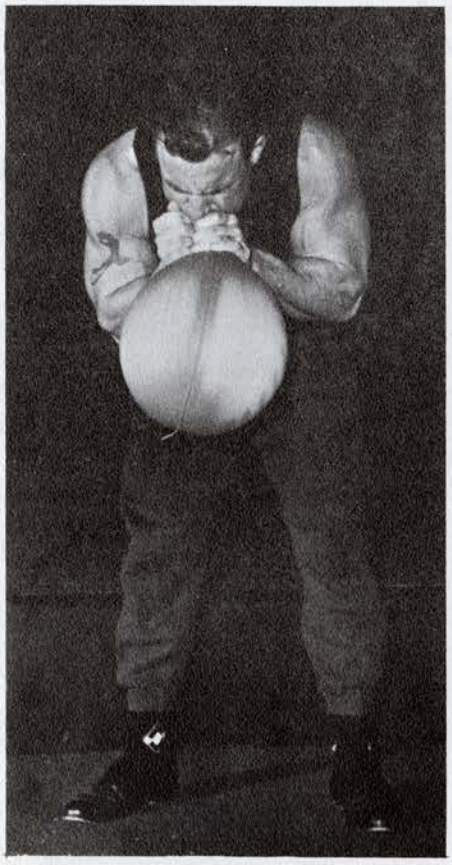
Let me tell you how to hold the bottle first. Grasp the neck of the bottle with an iron grip-like hold. Be sure your hands are dry as possible so as not to slip. Your fingers must squeeze the bottle tightly enough so as to hold back the air pressure as it builds up inside the bottle. Remember once you have a grip on the bottle you can't let go of it. You will have to continue this squeezing grip until the bottle burst.

The bottle will expand and the air, under pressure, will try to find an exit past your hands. It's a sad feeling to have air leaking out as you continue forcing more air into the bottle. It would take you twice as long to inflate the bottle in this manner.

Place the mouth of the bottle tightly against the skin around your mouth. Here is where your fingers must keep the bottle very close to your skin at all points.

Your lung power must now be controled as you force air into the bottle. Breath in through your nose and exhale through your mouth. Now, take a long deep breath through your nose, then exhale with a speedy burst into the bottle. Continue on, shortening your breath intake as the bottle inflates, exhaling with a burst of air. You will also find the most difficult part of inflating is the initial expanding. Once the bottle begins getting larger it takes less lung power.

You will notice that with the bottle inflated the pressure of air backing up will cause you difficulty in maintaining a proper breath control. Be very careful, this pressure can cause you damage. Keep your mouth closed tightly while inhaling the air through your nose or the air pressure may escape back into your lungs and collapse them. Also be very careful when the bottle explodes. The tremendous blast of air pressure can cause pieces of rubber to fly into your face; so close your eyes or have somebody hold their hands over them.



Hot water bottles burst at various degrees depending upon their own structure. So don't anticipate any certain inflated size as a bursting point, there isn't much of anyway to tell.

This feat can be mastered by anyone who is really interested enough to take the time to practice properly. Maintain a good grip and learn to breath properly and you will soon be able to control the important steps to bursting a hot water bottle.

breaking a chain

Mind and Muscle versus heavy gauge steel. The breaking of a chain in my bare hands isn't accomplished by shear strength - although without it I wouldn't get very far. I apply my full concentration to this feat. My mental attitude is completely channeled towards the objective of breaking the chain; thus, (with every ounce of strength I can muster up) it's physical power over material form.

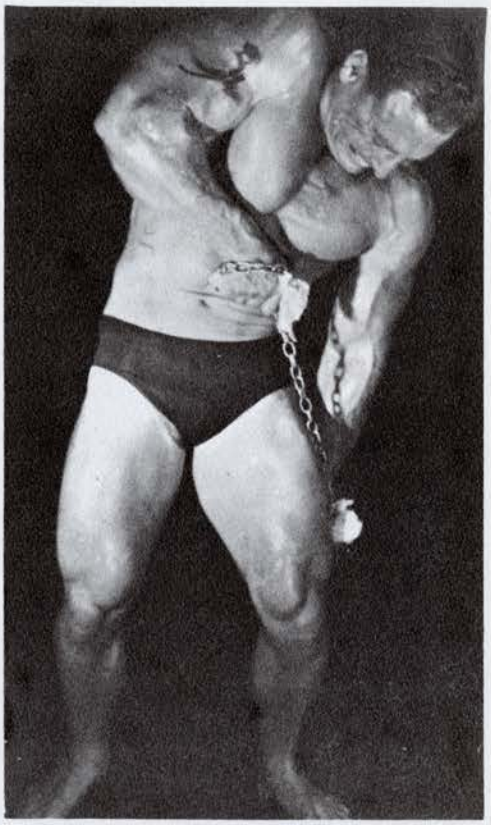
To begin this feat I get a chain about 36" in length and fabricated of heavy gauge steel. You should begin with very light chains and work up to heavier ones as you increase your strength and ability to break them.

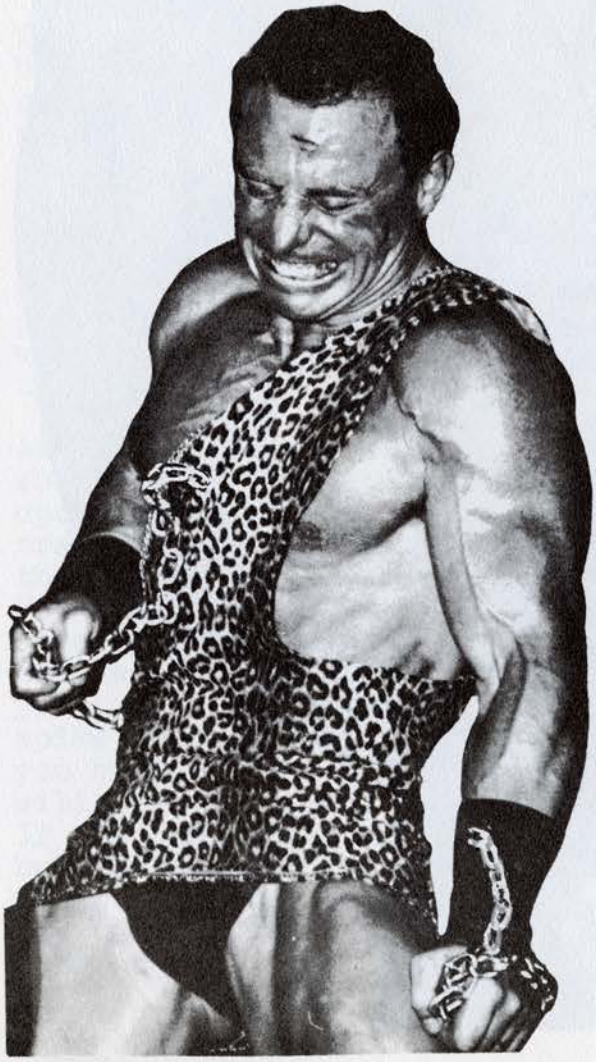
I first wrap a cloth or handkerchief around my hands to protect them from being injured by the chain when I apply my full force. Then I lay one end of the chain across my palm and back around the hand and through the palm again, then out over the thumb. This same proceedure is repeated with the other hand and the remaining end of the chain. I leave a little over a foot of chain between my hands. If I leave too much I can't get enough pull through the chest, back, and shoulders because the hands will be out of maximum strength range. Now I lock my thumbs around the chain tightly. My left hand becomes a vise holding the chain in place while my right hand maintains a continued pull. I hold my left arm down to the side with only a slight bend in the elbow joint. I must be certain that the chain does not slip through the hands when my full power is exerted. This is where the hand and gripping strength are most important. If the chain slips the full stress of the pull will not be brought to bare on the links and I will use up my strength. My feet are placed well for good balance.

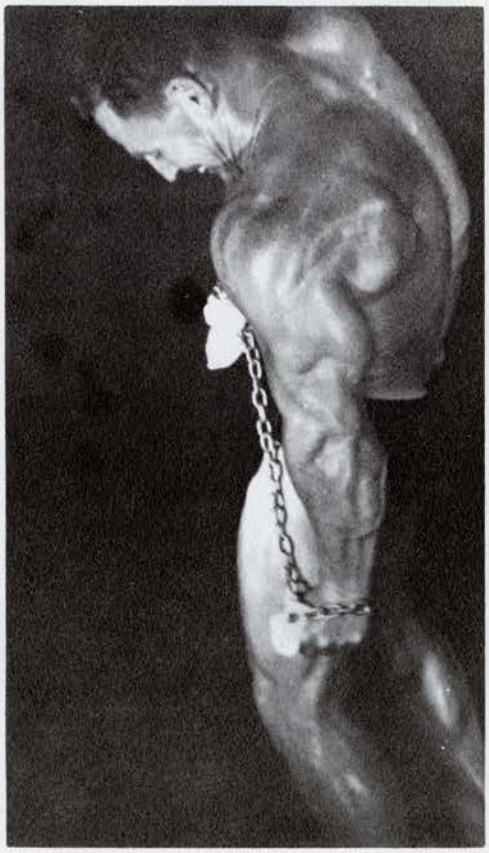
Now is the time I begin my concentration. Every muscle of the body comes into play. I'm tensed completely. Then slowly the pull is started, bringing all of my strength into use. When my application of power is at the peak I turn my hands slightly to put full pressure on all the links, searching for that weaker link. Many times the chain will hold fast at my first great pull, so I ease off slightly and then put my full effort again into the pull. After the chain does break I find myself shaking from the sudden release of tension and maximum concentration that I had built up to such a great peak during the sustained effort.

Remember to tighten your grip throughout the entire pull to add greater power to the stress being exerted on the chain.

The breaking of chains involves your whole body and mind as one unit applying itself to one purpose until the chain is conquered.







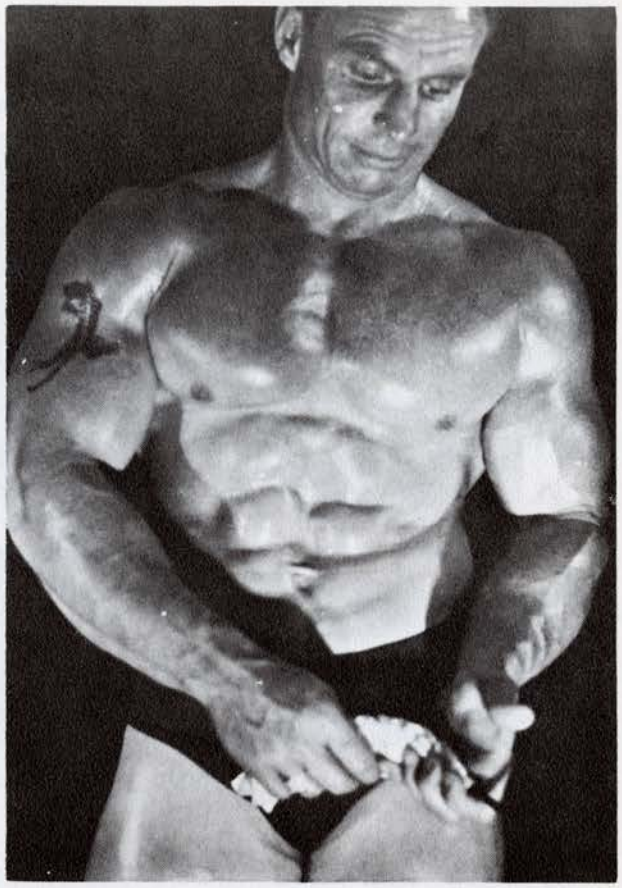
bending a spike

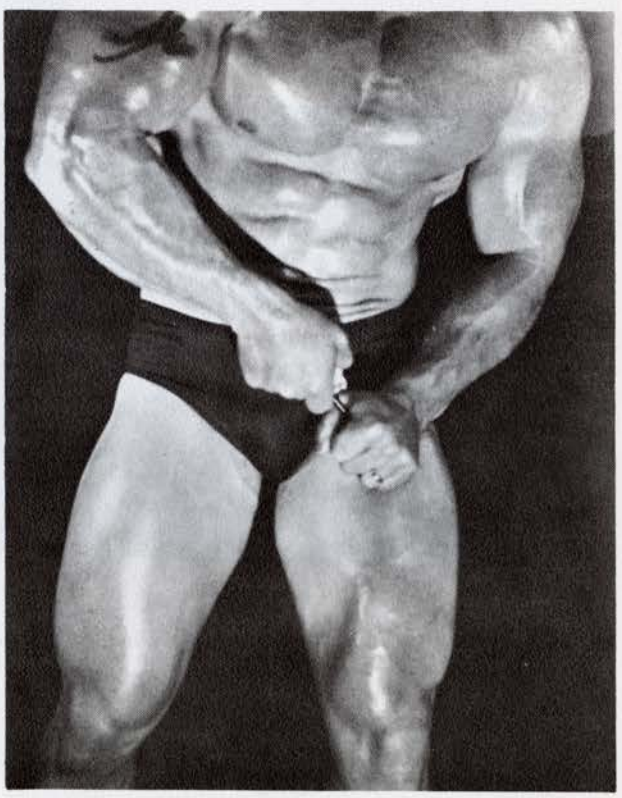
The word "bending" has a very fascinating ring to it. Almost everyone is impressed by any strength feat where objects are bent. I'm now going to describe to you how I bend a large nail or spike.

I would suggest for anyone attempting to perform this or any feat of strength to have some weight training "under their belt". Most feats take just that; strength. The more you can increase your strength the better you will be able to perform any stunt. Once you master the basic steps and with continued practice you will soon be bending large spikes with ease.

There are several positions for bending spikes; I prefer the knee position because I feel more secure with my hand on my knee. This position is also very impressive to the audience. You can make it look easy - or you may want to make it look very difficult. Once you learn how to perform the stunt properly the way you present your act is up to you.

As for the proper size spike you should use will depend of course upon your strength and previous training. The longer the spike the better leverage you will have. You will also have to consider the type of metal it is made of, besides the thickness. I suggest you try to begin with a 6" or 8" spike and less than 1/4" thick. If you begin with a shorter spike you will find it is difficult to bend. If you can't bend any size, don't be discouraged, keep trying, sooner or later your efforts will pay off and you will be able to bend one.

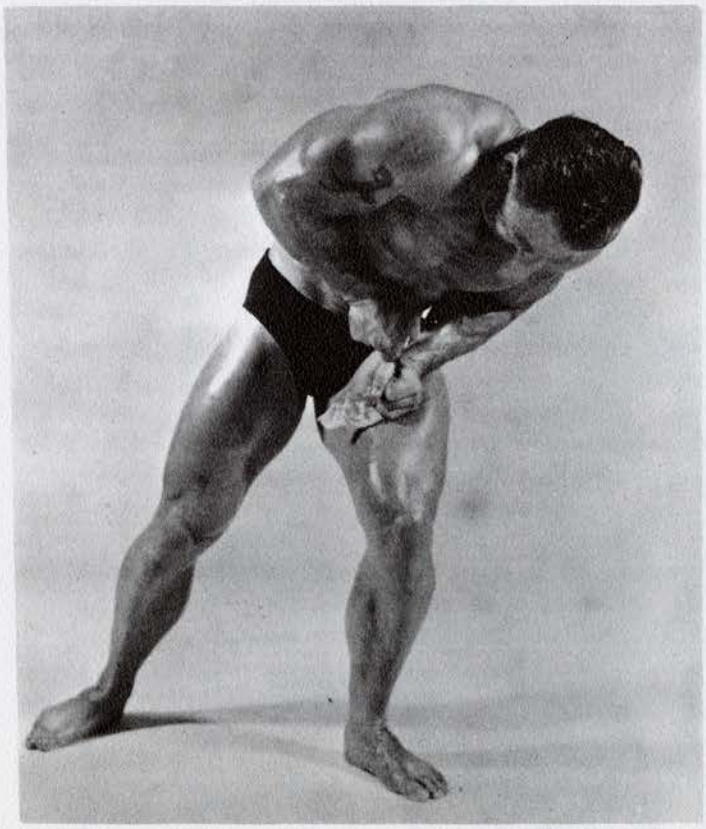


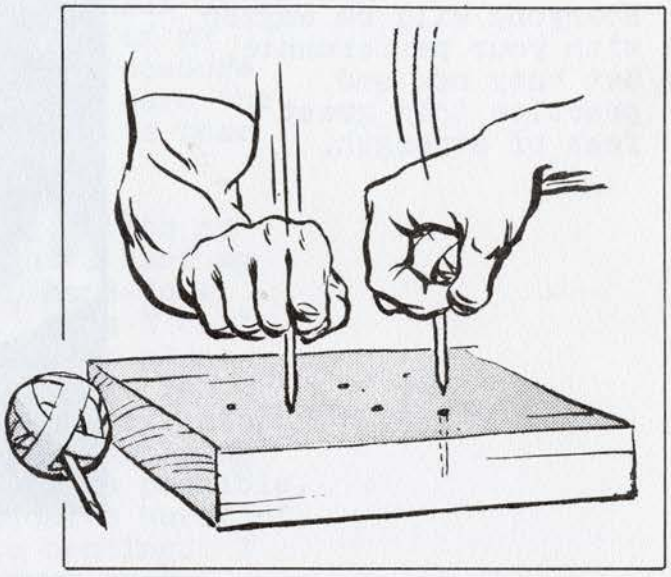


To begin my bending demonstration I wrap the spike so as it won't cut into my hands. I place the spike in my right hand with the head facing to the left. Then I take a cloth or hankerchief and wrap the head of the spike tightly, until it forms a good gripping area. Now I grasp the spike in the left hand leaving about half of it sticking out and resting in the crook of my thumb. Again I repeat the wrapping procedure around the point of the spike, making sure the point is completely wrapped so as not to tear through and damage my hand.

Now I'm ready to begin the bending. With my left leg slightly ahead of my right I bend my upper body over and place my left hand just above the left knee for support. This I call my vise hand, which holds the spike in place as I bend it over the thumb bone. Here is where my hand and forearm strength comes into action. With the right hand I begin applying pressure, and bend the spike as far as possible. Bare down, try using a quick explosive burst of strength to shock your spike into bending. I won't be able to bend the spike more than halfway at this point. I then raise the spike to the chest with the ends down and make my finishing bends by crushing it together. This also makes the performance more dramatic.

After you learn to use more effort you will be able to accomplish this feat easily. Everyone will be amazed with your performance. Get busy now and practice this great feat of strength.





driving a spike

Here is an impressive stunt that can be performed almost anywhere with a couple of simple objects: a spike and a board. Begin with about a $\frac{1}{2}$" or 3/4" thick piece of soft wood. It should be about 3 feet long, just enough to lay across a couple of chairs for support, with room left in the middle clear of any obstacles. Later on you can progress to larger boards or several together for a greater impression. Use about a 4" thin spike, but sturdy enough not to bend on you. As you progress you can use thicker spikes. The thickness makes it harder to drive through the wood.

Your first consideration is to the injury of your hand. Until you toughen up your hands enough to withstand the great force you will place upon the drive of the small spike you should use a protection. Either place a piece of leather between your hand and the head of the spike or wrap your hand firmly with a piece of cloth or padding of some sort. This should be set firmly behind the head of the spike against your palm and first couple of fingers. But be sure to toughen those hands up first.

Now place your board across the chairs or boxes so as it is very firm. Any give of the board will only make the drive harder for you. Also by placing your free hand on the board will firm it even more. Select your spike for sharpness if possible. Every little thing will aid you in the final drive.

Make your drive as long as possible. In other words bring your arm up as high as you can. The more room you have from your beginning position to the target the more speed and power you will be able to gather; thus aiding in the actual driving of the spike through the board.

Stand over the board. Keep your shoulder well in line with the target. The final drive will incorporate your arm strength plus your shoulder power backed up with your body power. The final impact will be a result of your entire bodys drive. Keep your line of drive straight as well as keeping the spike straight in your hand. All this will aid in a solid hit and insure the spike in going through your target.

Drive as fast and as hard as you can. Practice will give you a better feel. It will give you confidence. Soon you will be able to accomplish this feat with ease. Once you learn how to use all the power you can muster up you will be able to drive your spike through many boards.

PHOTO CREDITS

Robert Kennedy: cover

Weider Publications: inside front and back cover, back cover, page 2, 6, 9, 10, 14, 16

Iron Man Magazine: page 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13

Douglas White: page 12